



EHUD BARAK

Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Steven Erlanger. I am the bureau chief in Paris for *The New York Times*. Before I was there I spent four years of my life based in Jerusalem covering Israel and Palestine. I would not say that Ehud Barak is an old friend exactly, but he is someone I respect and whom I have been writing about for some time. My four years there is the reason my hair is grey. I am not sure what Ehud would say.

We have only an hour and we have a lot to cover, so my intention here is to ask Mr Barak some questions and then give you some time to ask some questions because I am sure there are lots of things on everyone's mind. I would just say briefly that I think everyone knows about Ehud Barak but he is among other things the most-

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

I can summarise my experience in a few words. I think of myself as a friend of all journalists. They probably do not think so.

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

I think that is true by the way; they do not.

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

I spent 40 years in uniform. As long as I dealt with Arabs I had black hair. When I started to deal with our own citizens, together with other friends in politics, it turned grey.

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

He is amusing. He is also the most decorated soldier in Israeli history. He has been prime minister. He has been chief of staff. He has been defence minister. He has been deeply involved with the interests of Israel for quite a long time and politically, although that is not so much the issue here, recently left the Labour Party to remain in the government as defence minister.

I want to ask you the following question, actually if I may, sir. All around Israel, you have, let us call it an awakening, an Arab awakening. You can describe it in many ways; it is differentiated country by country. Some are going better than others, but in the end, it is a demand from young people for the most part for dignity, for a sense of mastery over their governments and their own lives, for justice and for democracy. Israel, for a long time, has said that it was the only democracy in the Middle East almost as an excuse for not doing more. I am wondering sir, whether you consider their awakening a good thing for Israel or a danger?



Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

I think we have to think of it as a world phenomenon that has not been witnessed since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In the long range, it is an extremely moving and inspiring phenomenon, as you have mentioned, with people standing on their feet demanding what has been taken for granted in most corners of the world, the basic human rights that they have demanded. In the short and medium term, it is totally unpredictable what will happen. The societies are not fully ripe for the gestalt of democratic life. I would not expect any kind of Vaclav Havel, a moral beacon, to emerge as a leader in any of these countries, and in the short term we might find that the more organized elements and mainly the Islamists and Muslims brotherhood or some other bodies like this will take over, will probably take over whole societies and it could become quite disturbing.

In terms of the security of Israel, we received a lesson in modesty; we cannot pretend to control, to fully understand or to fully predict all of these events. We are focused because we are a little bit isolated in the region. We are focused on our security, and we hope that the economic needs of those societies, the need to keep normal relations, the activity of major operations like the Suez Canal, the need to reason and common sense will prevail. Even if some in some societies, Muslim parties will take a higher profile role, there will still be the structure of international commitments, and they will keep the peace with Israel in shape and in place.

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

Let me ask you about Egypt. The Sinai is pretty much lawless. Things are going in and out of Gaza without much control. You nearly lost your embassy in Cairo. You had to call Leon Panetta because no Egyptian would answer the phone. Even Tantawi would not answer the phone. What lesson did you take from that? Do you need to make the border with Sinai even more secure? What do you need to do?

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

We need the border to be more secure for other reasons as well. There is a major movement of work, of the work force, to cross the border, from-

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

Refugees and immigrants.

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

No, refugees should be treated with... I fear Mary, she still carries a deterrent. Everyone deals with refugees in a proper manner. There are many just people who want to work and we can accept it and they are crossing borders into Egypt and out of Egypt and there is a less controlled area. The Egyptian leadership is making a lot of effort. We are in daily contact with the military authorities. They are trying. We are allowing them to bring more forces into Sinai but I can understand them if in Cairo certain issues look so urgent for them, so that sometimes it looks as if things are going out of full control in Sinai. It is extremely disturbing. Just this morning, back in Jerusalem, the government passed a new decision, a resolution, to finance an urgent effort to create an obstacle, a fence with some electronic devices on it all along the way from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea to help the-



Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

I must say that is a familiar topic, building a barrier, building a ditch, building a trench between Gaza and-

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

We would love to live in North America or Western Europe but unfortunately-

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

Let me ask you, because not too long ago, two years ago, Israel went to war in Gaza, Operation Cast Lead, to cut back Hamas because it was getting weapons that were quite serious. Most people would say Hamas is much better armed today, and Hezbollah is much better armed today than before Israel's wars. Is Gaza once again coming up on the urgency list for Israel in military terms?

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

Since we have started discovering here in Vienna, is that there were 36 rockets shot from the Gaza Strip into our civilian villages and cities in the South. I would like to ask how many of you would accept a neighbouring non-state or some militia that get orders from heaven to wipe you out of the map in history, that are shooting real rockets on the heads of real civilians. Our primary contract with our citizens is to protect them against exactly that. I expect no one to blame us if at a certain point we come to the point where we have to take more assertive action to put an end to it. I hope it will not be very soon but at a certain point we will have to do this. The Middle East is a tough neighbourhood, nothing to compare with Western Europe or North America. We would love to have Canadians as our neighbours.

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

There are enough Canadians.

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

I still remember, even Europe, after Martin Luther, 150 years of religious wars and another 300 years of national wars before you became what is now as Jean-David Levitte described it, 70 years of tranquillity, longer than the post Vienna congress.

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

That was the European awakening, and there was quite a lot of blood.



Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

Remember, it took several decades after the real awakening of Europe in 1848 until things started to settle down.

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

Let me ask you about Syria. There is a big issue. You have a stable border. Whatever one thinks about the Bashar Assad regime, it has been stable. Do you think it is important that the West support the opposition in Syria? Would you like Bashar to go, would you call for his removal?

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

First of all, there is deterioration there since we gathered here. The decline of these families is a blessing for the Middle East. Something is wrong with the way such a family suppresses the will of the Syrian people. The family kills them, slaughtering their own peoples; probably three or four thousand people already killed, or maybe more. I do not know, it is attenuating. I think this family has ended, it is historical. They are going to disappear probably in a few weeks and hopefully we will end up like Salak in Yemen and not like Gaddafi in Libya.

However, it is beyond our control. We do not think we are to intervene in any way. I do not believe that the Europeans, who have all the problems on the table, will take steps to intervene. I think that the Turks are watching it from a very close distance; they understand the region much better than anyone outside the region. They reigned over Syria for 400 years. They understand them. You asked if they have a very intimate economic relationship. They know each other personally. The fact that the Arab League so courageously isolated Assad, and that even a weak monarch like King Abdullah, not an extremely strong one, took the courage to criticize them publicly. The way that Davutoğlu and Erdogan are talking about Assad makes it clear to everyone in the region that they are doomed, that they will fall. No one knows what exactly will happen there, but I feel in my guts that Syria is a less religious society than the Egyptian. There are certain bands of civil society, of the middle class and there are enough people, I believe, in the security services, in the armed forces, in the business community and in the academic community which will be ready to join hands once the regime has fallen and make the future government with representatives from everywhere. I think that it is better. I cannot predict exactly how. However, it is better than this phenomenon, the opposite of what is said to Barbara Walters, 'exactly killing his own people'.

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

Are you worried that he will try to preserve his role with an attack on Israel?

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

I do not think that it is something concrete. I watched his ceremony of launching probably ten or eight missiles. It seems to me to be due to pressure. It is probably to signal to Turkey not to consider establishing an accordance within Syria if things get worse. It happened closer to our border, but I do not think that they will try to threaten Israel. I do not think it would have worked. Too many people hate him now that some might find a blessing in trying to hit Israel and God knows what will follow.



Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

Now, you have had strains with Turkey, but are you talking to the Turks about the situation in Syria. Are you exchanging intelligence?

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

Not enough. I think that two years ago we would have been exchanging at least some views or some information. Recently, in the last year, as a result of the events with the Mavi Marmara incidents, we have not yet been able to iron out these differences. Sometimes steps taken from Turkey are not extremely helpful. We will probably have to find a way, because Turkey is an important pillar in the Middle East.

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

All you have to do is say that you are sorry for those deaths of the Turks and that you made a mistake that is all you have to do.

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

No, I say, the morning after the event, a year and a half ago, I as the defence minister said publicly that I wanted to express on behalf of myself and all of us a deep sorrow and regret; not about the blockade, because we think it is our right; not about stopping these vessels; not about when they refuse to go to Ashdod; not about holding them or using force where there is an immediate danger to the life of fighters; but no one intended to cause the loss of life to those activists even if they did not behave properly, and I expressed this regret, and it did not help for some reason.

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

How vulnerable is the King of Jordan in your view?

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

I do not think that I have to express a view about the royal palace. It seems to me that monarchs within this whole Arab spring, all along the region from Morocco to Jordan to Saudi Arabia to the Emirates, that those who rule, not just as a result of taking power in hand, but with some heavenly aura or some lineage to the prophet Mohammed, that they ended up being more stable than secular states, and probably part of it is to be able to replace the prime minister whenever some problems start-

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

It is every other week these days.



Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

-they are more detached. I hope for stability, I hope that they will overcome. There is no way to do it without being more open. Probably the Jordanian King as well as some in the Arab peninsula were most successfully deployed for this event which was unpredictable for them as well, by giving some place for Muslim parties in the parliament more open place for internal discussions, more openness for women.

My personal view is that if we could somehow miraculously end up with having mandatory high school education for each and every young woman in the Muslim world, it would change the whole landscape within a generation, because openness to women immediately changed their approach to reproduction, their approach to careers, their approach to participating in the work force and even their awareness of their rights. I believe that those leaders in the Arab world who opened their societies more for many voices and for women's advancement ended up more stable when they faced this Arab Spring.

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

I think Jordan is shaky. Most people think Jordan is pretty shaky. The king has alienated a lot of the society and a lot of people look at him as a foreigner and as a foreigner married to a foreigner-Palestinian. I am sure there must be some anxiety.

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

How do you connect him to the Palestinians?

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

His wife is Palestinian, Rania.

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

Many of the population of Jordan are Palestinian, about 65 % of the population. Many of the elites of the academy, the business community, the Foreign Service are Palestinian, so they are very well adapted. We once again repeated our position, because some voices were heard from Israel that probably Jordan is the natural Palestinian state. We explicitly denied it. Our position is that the Hashemite kingdom is an important element. They have the right and the responsibility to iron out differences or reach equilibrium politically and socially within themselves and they respect the Palestinians. Of course, the King visited Abu Mazen last week, I believe, in Ramallah and we respect the Palestinians. I believe that in the end we will have a healthy and strong Hashemite kingdom, a new healthy and strong Palestinian state that will live side by side with Israel, taking into account our security concerns and our basic rights as a nation and a strong and independent Israel.

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

You mentioned Abu Mazen Mahmoud Abbas. He is getting on in years. It is not so clear how his health is. He seems pretty weak. Do you think a weak Abu Mazen is good for Israel?



Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

No. I do not think so. That is probably not a unanimous view in the Israeli body politic. He was elected by his own people. It is not our role to pass judgement or elect a leader for others. It is their own choice. We live in a tough neighbourhood. They say that a person cannot choose his parents and a nation cannot choose its neighbours, whoever they are. I think that we should be taken by our word. We say loudly and clearly even with the present government, which is not exactly a left-wing government, it is basically a right-wing government, but myself heading the Independent Party. Here with me is Dr Eiant Wilf, she has a birthday today and she is the best of our faction in the Knesset.

We are the only centre-to left party in the government but I believe in the position of the government of Israel expressed by Netanyahu himself in a very long speech and repeatedly in speeches in America from the Knesset podium. We strongly believe in two states for two peoples: a strong independent Israel with its security considerations that I believe now everyone in the world understands. This will be side by side with a Palestinian democratic state that is de-militarized but living in a good way to express the dreams and the future of the Palestinian people. In the same way, Israel is determined to reflect the Jewish old dream of coming back to our country.

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

That brings two questions. One is if you think it is better to have a stronger Abu Mazen than a weaker one. How do you help him, and secondly why do you not stop settlement expansions, that would help him too?

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

First of all, we want the person in authority to be effective. Abu Mazen, Prime Minister Fayyad with the support of Abu Mazen, they are extremely intensively active on building a bottom up approach, the infrastructure and the institutions. It is far from perfect, there is a long way to go but the direction is clear and is extremely positive. They deserve support from the world. We have recently passed a decision not to block the flow of taxes we collect for them. I hope it will not be raised once again. Having said that, I do not think we were the obstacle. We are ready.

I personally was Prime Minister 10 years ago, and Abu Mazen was deputy to Arafat, we put together with President Clinton an offer on the table that answered metaphorically for more than 90% of their demands. We did not tell Arafat to 'take it or leave it'. We did not try to dictate to him. We just said to accept this as a basis for negotiation. He rejected it. It ended up with the judgement that Arafat did not want to solve what he called 67 occupations but 47, the very establishment of a Jewish state in the region. Many in Israel still wonder to what extent the present leadership, which is, I believe, more moderate than Arafat, but it will be proven only through deeds; they abandon this vision of what we call the phased approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We believe that we have to act, that we should be ready to act. We tried. I tried. Several years later, Tzipi Livni and later Ehud Olmert tried, and whenever we came closer to the point of the decision, the moment of truth, I call it receding horizons. You come closer; you find the other side moves. You come once again closer. They grab whatever was on the table, make it the starting point for the next round and made another demand. That tried to shake the belief even within left-wing Israelis about the real intentions of the other side. I do not believe that we can do it without trying. We do not have to speculate because with speculation you can end up with self-fulfilling prophecies. That is bad. However, we have to start and negotiate, and I hope the other side will be ready.



Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

Well, let me ask you this because, sometimes, I think Israel finds the current situation difficult but sustainable, it is okay. Risking a lot for peace feels dangerous, because you have domestic unrest. You have pull-back settlements. I covered throughout Gaza, I watched what happened there. Therefore, it is easier to keep it as it is. It is a wound but it does not hurt all the time. Is that true for the Palestinians too? Do you think they are, in the end, afraid of the real risks of making the compromises necessary for peace?

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

No change could be achieved without all sides mustering the courage to step into the room and make decisions. However, I do not feel that the blame lies on our side. Let me take, for example, the issue of settlement. I talked to Abu Mazen several times about it, including this year. I think he adapted it from some statements of the Americans and probably some quoted from foreign ministers that made far-reaching statements, not a single block. I said, 'how can we do it?' He said, 'let it be a de facto arrangement'. There are no de facto arrangements. We are only living in a transparent world.

We stated that we stopped the settlements and Netanyahu's government was the first one ever to put a freeze on any activities for 10 months. We tried to start negotiations, but we could not but think of it, I do not think that the issue of settlement is that crucial. When I led the negotiations with Arafat, the rate of construction was four times the present one. When Olmert negotiated, just a few years ago with Abu Mazen himself, the rate of construction, I was Minister of Defence, even at Olmert's government; it was twice the present rate. This government is building less, it has a lower rate of construction, than anyone else in the previous times. It is the only government that has put a full freeze on construction for 10 months.

Ultimately, it does not change the present situation. Think of it, after 44 years of reigning over what we call the region Judaea-Samaria, all settlements together do not cover even 2% of the area. We do not build new settlements. That is just propaganda. We add certain units to already existing settlements, mainly in the settlement blocks where we believe they will be part of Israel, even if many of us believe that there will be, at least partly, swaps that will compensate people, so that is not the real block. The real block is the readiness to recognise what Arafat rejected and was unready to recognise: that Israel has the right to establish a Jewish democratic state where the dreams and the identity or the future of the Jewish people will be able to express itself without hurting any rights of individuals, communities and of other minorities, including Palestinians Arabs who are living within Israel. The Jewish state will be side by side peacefully with a Palestinian state that will express Palestinian dreams and rights for their own identity.

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

This is true. There are lots of issues. It is also true, because I have driven up and down and all around, it is not that big, the face of the West Bank has changed.

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

For the better.



Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

Well if you are a Palestinian, not for the better because there is less of it for you.

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

Why?

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

Israel has taken the settlement blocks. Ariel has gone deep into the West Bank.

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

It is there. Ariel is there for 30 years. It was the same place.

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

It has got much deeper.

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

No.

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

It has done. I have seen it.

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

The college is over there. It stayed there. The college is very close to it.

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

Sharon made a unilateral gesture. He did not believe in negotiations with the Palestinians. He thought it would make their lives more miserable, so he left Gaza and one could say it is no bad thing.



Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

Look what happened. Toward the end of his career, some of you knew him personally; I know that he was not the greatest lover of Arabs among Israelis politically. Toward the end of his active career, he made a gallant U-turn and decided to pull out of Gaza. No-one fully understood, including his supporters, why exactly he did it at this time but he decided to do it. He pulled out to the last settler, last square inch, and last soldier. He destroyed synagogues and settlements and he took the bodies of Israelis from graves and brought them back to Israel in order to make sure that there would be no excuse whatsoever to carry any violence against Israel out of the Gaza strip. We expected it to be an example for the PA (Palestinian Authority), they have no complaints, no statements, nothing whatsoever.

It ended up that after a year-and-a-half that Hamas took over. They have their own ideas; orders from heaven to shoot. They accumulated 8,000, now they are moving towards 10,000 rockets from all over the world, from Iran, from Sudan, from Krynica from Libya, so we have to be realistic. I approached Dr Einat Wilf and Meir Sheerit, whom I see here, who was former Minister of Finance and the main leader of the Likud, then Kadima, and who understands the Arab world and who has some background in North Africa. When we tried to convince the Israelis to make the step and to find the courage to go, the Israelis asks us, 'Are you realistic? Did you see what happened when we pulled out from Gaza?' or they look at me and they say, 'You, Barak, you pulled out from Lebanon.' To the last square inch. After 18 years of tragedy that cost the lives of many, to liberate many. What happened next? Hezbollah took over. They have their own mission from Iran, their own vision. They gather 45,000 rockets and missiles to cover all of Israel.

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

You had to go back. Basically, you think that unilateral gestures are not the point that you need a deal. That is what I hear you saying.

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

I think that we should try for the full thing. Not many ministers believe it. I believe that we need a deal in order to make sure that we do not miss an opportunity that probably is hidden there. If this is impossible, and we cannot solve all issues, security and borders, refugees in Jerusalem, an end of conflict and finality of mutual claims, but we should find something which is short of this maximum ideal situation. We could find a way, together with Abu Mazen and Fayyad, to see what could be done on the ground and what could be done in understanding, what could be done to respond to the quota demands, what could be done in order to hold both hope and practice. I think that the situation in the West Bank is much better as a result of Fayyad's activities, as a result of further coordination with our security forces, as a result of your support, your very generous support from Europe and from the United States and as a result of building some 10 battalions or so of security forces who are working on stability. When you visit the streets of Ramallah, Nablus or any other major city, it is nothing in comparison with what you used to see; there are no gangs on the streets, and it is more orderly run than many other corners of the world that you visit from time to time.

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

Now we have been circling, in a way, around the topic of Iran.

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

Quite successfully if you continue for another half an hour.



Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

I have got a bunker buster in my pocket. How anxious is Israel getting about Iran's efforts to put its enrichment underground? I mean, do we have a moment of decision coming, is it far away, what can you tell us?

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

There is an implicit assumption in your question in that it is a problem for Israel.

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

I said 'we' but it also is a problem for Israel.

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

I believe that it is a problem for the world. We have Amano, the head of the IAEA, listen to him during this or other issues. I think that the recent report is extremely important not because it tells something that the American president or the German Chancellor or the British Prime Minister did not know, but because it makes it transparent and apparent to the whole world that the Iranians are trying to turn nuclear. It is a challenge for the whole world because a nuclear Iran will totally change the landscape of the Middle East. It will impose on the other 3 pillars to turn nuclear. Namely, you could listen a day before this gathering to what was published on behalf of Prince Turki who was here, an extremely extraordinary figure from Saudi Arabia; he predicted that they will not have a way but to turn nuclear. Listen to Davutoğlu, the foreign minister of Turkey, those of you who had the opportunity until a year ago to talk to Mubarak, or Omar Suleiman about what will follow in Egypt.

I believe it is the end of any non-proliferation regime, and it will start the countdown to the terrible vision discussed by Professor Graham Allison of Harvard University about terrorist and nuclear capability. At the end, if so many players will do this, some of them led by Islamist groups, you will not be able to avoid the leakage of weapons grade materials. It is not just about nuclear capability. It is about the way that terrorism is responsible. Every terrorist organization, Al Qaeda, Lakshmi, the Baluchi tribes in Afghanistan, the Shiite in Iraq, the Hutis in Yemen, the bandits in Somalia, all of them are somehow responsible to Iran, not to mention Hezbollah and Hamas. It is a crazy situation-

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

You have just given a good reason for doing something. Obviously Israel and its allies are doing something.

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

For the whole world. I do not know exactly what happened in these recent explosions in some place in Iran.



Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

Some people think it was missiles.

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

Afterwards, they buried one of the leaders of the missile programme, but I would not be surprised if they keep moving toward missiles, which have a longer range than those that cover Israel or neighbouring countries. It is only a matter of time before Vienna will be within the reach of their missiles or Paris or probably other corners of the world. It is a crazy situation; it is not a normal one. The Iranian people are extremely gifted with a long history and great civilization. However, they were caught by a group of ayatollahs, all of them extreme. All of them, including the moderate ayatollahs, are extremely extreme. They decided to tell from every podium that Israelis should be erased from the map and from history. They happened to produce not just Persian carpets or new models of Barbie dolls, but they happened to produce nuclear weapons. It would be totally irresponsible not to look reality in the eye and understand that something quite disturbing is happening.

Now having said all that, I still believe that time is for urgent, coherent, paralysing sanctions, and nothing short of a full quarantine of imports and exports of oil products and a direct attack and isolation by the whole world of the Iranian central bank. Nothing short of these kinds of sanctions will work. It is urgent because they have a plan, deliberately staged, to which reach certain immunities through redundancy by producing or creating a situation where there are too many sides, too many centrifuges, so that they will be practically immune. Only then will they feel immune, and they will consider how to continue. It is so apparent and simple that I wonder sometimes how honest people and leaders in the world find it so hard to see it

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

The only way they will stop is if they feel the Islamic revolution itself is at risk and their own revolutionary guards. It is going to take more than sanctions. I mean, do you favour something short of bombing, something like a sea embargo of Iran? It is an act of war, but it is not bombing. It is not ground troops. Is this something people should consider?

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

First of all, the tensions, there are tensions within these elite. There are social analysts simmering from underneath in Iran. I believe the Iranian people can look at how people are living around them and around the world and have second thoughts about the promise of this regime for them. As I mentioned earlier, we learned a lesson about modesty. We cannot pretend that we can really influence actively what happens there internally. I would love to see the Arab Spring 'jumping over the Arab gate' or the Persian gate, depending on which side you look at it, into Iran but it did not happen.

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

It got crushed.



Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

Yes, it got crushed two years earlier, probably without enough support or backing from the world. Basically, I believe it is a challenge for the whole world: there is no stable equilibrium there. Many are worried for good reasons, regarding what might follow if something deteriorates in Iran. Try to close your eyes, think that you are three years down the road and Iran turns nuclear. They will have the very same intention to hegemonize neighbours, to intimidate neighbours who would have liberated small emirates if it is overrun by nuclear Iran with a simple boat and 20 people in each boat. You can only close your eyes and think of what would have been the case with Gaddafi if he would have credibly declared, at the opening of recent events there, that he had three or four nuclear devices. What would have been the decision-making process?

Steven ERLANGER, Paris Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*

Just before I go to the audience, I want to ask you: Meir Dagan and other former intelligence officials have said that there has been a big debate in the government about a military strike on Iran and that you were supportive of it. Is this inaccurate, is it accurate, is it out of context, what do you say?

Ehud BARAK, Former Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel

It would be better if he would not produce these ideas and share them. Of course, there are discussions in Israel. We discussed many issues. I cannot directly answer this question. I do not want to answer this question. It was not the greatest moment. Dagan is a great person with many achievements. I do not want to directly answer this. I think that this regime in Iran, the ayatollah's, it will not be there in 10 or 15 years' time. It is against the nature of the Iranian people and what happens all around the world. If they turn nuclear they might assure another layer of political immunity for the regime in the same way as Kim Jong-il assured his immunity. If his regime had not been nuclear, I believe the regime would have been found out. There is a competition between turning the military nuclear or going out of power, and I believe that the world has to act in a coordinated manner to make sure that this regime of the combination of the ayatollah and nuclear weapons is not healthy for any neighbours.